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Persian, Farsi, Dari, Tajiki: Language Names and Language Policies

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Abstract

Persian is an important language today in a number of countries of west, south and central Asia. But its status in each is different. In Iran its unique status as the only official or national language continues to be jealously guarded, even though half—probably more—of the population use a different language (mainly Azari/Azeri Turkish) at home, and on the streets, though not in formal public situations, and not in writing. Attempts to broach this exclusive status of Persian in Iran have increased in recent decades, but are still relatively minor. Persian (called *tajiki*) is also the official language of Tajikistan, but here it shares that status informally with Russian, while in the west of the country Uzbek is also widely used and in the more isolated eastern part of the country other local Iranian languages are now dominant. In Afghanistan, although Persian (officially renamed *dari* in 1964, but still commonly called *farsi*) is the official language, the national language is Pashto, and there is no official restriction on the use of other languages (see discussion by Nawid in this volume). Persian also continues to be spoken in some of the northern and western parts of Pakistan and the southern littoral of the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, for most people in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, for reasons that are explained later, Persian is informally recognized as a classical language. In the other countries of the region—Turkey, the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf and the other Central Asian republics—somewhat negative, discriminatory attitudes are found with regard to Persian. This situation is a consequence of the nationalisms that have emerged over the past fifty years or so. This unusual combination of vast geographical distribution and country-by-country variation can be explained only by detailed reference to the history of the language. Persian makes an interesting historical case study, because it includes in a somewhat exaggerated form a number of features that are found in other modern languages that have long textual records—features which throw a shadow of the continuing development of language policies in all these countries, and may illuminate some of the less tangible factors behind language policy in general.

Disciplines

Anthropological Linguistics and Sociolinguistics | Anthropology | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Chapter 4:
PERSIAN, FARSI, DARI, TAJIKI

Language Names and Language Policies

by

Brian Spooner

Persian is an important language today in a number of countries of west, south and central Asia. But its status in each is different. In Iran its unique status as the only official or national language continues to be jealously guarded, even though half—probably more—of the population use a different language (mainly Azari/Azeri Turkish) at home, and on the streets, though not in formal public situations, and not in writing. Attempts to broach this exclusive status of Persian in Iran have increased in recent decades, but are still relatively minor. Persian (called *tajiki*) is also the official language of Tajikistan, but here it shares that status informally with Russian, while in the west of the country Uzbek is also widely used and in the more isolated eastern part of the country other local Iranian languages are now dominant. In Afghanistan, although Persian (officially renamed *dari* in 1964, but still commonly called *farsi*) is the official language, the national language is Pashto, and there is no official restriction on the use of other languages (see discussion by Nawid in this volume). Persian also continues to be spoken in some of the northern and western parts of Pakistan and the southern littoral of the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, for most people in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, for reasons that are explained later, Persian is informally recognized as a classical language. In the other countries of the region—Turkey, the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf and the other Central Asian republics—somewhat negative, discriminatory attitudes are found with regard to Persian. This situation is a consequence of the nationalisms that have emerged over the past fifty years or so. This unusual combination of vast geographical distribution and country-by-country variation can be explained only by detailed reference to the history of the language. Persian makes an interesting historical case study, because it includes in a somewhat exaggerated form a number of features that are found in other modern languages that have long textual records—features which throw a shadow of the continuing development of language policies in all these countries, and may illuminate some of the less tangible factors behind language policy in general.

Persian is an unusual, perhaps unique, case in world history: unlike other languages which become media of written communication before the modern period, it moved seamlessly out of its mediaeval past into the status of official language in three modern countries without undergoing any significant modification. New Persian, the form of the language which emerged in the Arabic script in the 8th century AD (with a borrowed Arabic vocabulary component comparable to the Latin in English) is the direct successor to Middle Persian (written in a form of the Aramaic script since the third century BC) and Old Persian before that (written in cuneiform

since the 6th century BC). Besides the longevity and relative stability of New Persian over a period exceeding a millennium (for more detail see Spooner and Hanaway in press) from earlier periods of very low literacy rates to present situations of near universal literacy, and from language of dynastic courts and administration to national language—texts from the 9th and 10th centuries are fully legible and still in use among educated Iranians today—this historical continuity was facilitated by a number of factors. The most important are:

(a) the geographical extent of its standard usage between the 9th and the 19th centuries, from as far east as the trade routes into central China under the Mongol (Yuan) dynasty in the 13th century, south over the Deccan Plateau into southern India under the Mughals, and as far west as the western reaches of the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia, as the public language for any function associated with writing—administration, trade, literature—regardless of local spoken languages, among non-Muslims (e.g. Hindus) as well as Muslims,

(b) its association with the authority of governments and the culture (*adab*) of the secular elites of cities throughout this vast area,

(c) the social organization of literacy (over an area much larger than the group of modern countries considered in this volume), which effectively restricted entry to the literate class down to the middle of the 20th century, the consistent degree of interaction among members of the urban literate class throughout this area by travel and correspondence, and the high cultural and religious value ascribed throughout the population (non-literate as well as literate) down to the present day to the corpus of poetry written in Persian over the past millennium.

(d) the boost of foreign (Western) interest in the cultural heritage for which it was the vehicle, inspired by European classical education and Orientalism from the Elizabethan period on;

(e) the practice of colonial administration in India down to 1837.

In this chapter I explore how these factors combined in the 19th-20th centuries to shape modern attitudes towards standard Persian over this vast area, attitudes which more recently have begun to unravel as a consequence of the emergence of vernacular nationalisms.

The English name “Persian” is from the name that has been in Western vocabulary since Herodotus (c. 484 - 425 BC). It comes from *Pars*, the area around Persepolis (the Greek name we use for the summer capital of the Achaemenian Empire) on the southwestern edge of the Iranian Plateau. When the Persians began to convert to Islam after the Arab conquest in the middle of the 7th century, the language was naturally influenced by the language of the Qur'an. Eventually, Arabic settled into a role comparable to that of Latin in mediaeval Europe. When the name of the area around Persepolis shifted from *pars* to *fars* (Arabic had no /p/), the name of the language spoken there shifted similarly to *farsi*. Since Persian was the language of administration of western Asia under the pre-Islamic Iranian empires, and it was the language of the secretarial class, it continued to be used by non-Arabic speakers in the Islamic civilization that succeeded them, and consequently spread over a much larger area—eventually at its peak in the 14th century as far west as the Ottoman territories of what is now Bosnia, east into the Tarim Basin around the Takla Makan and down the major trade routes into central China, and south into the

Muslim Sultanates of north and south India, where it remained the language of administration, literature and polite society under the Mughals, and later the British, into the 19th century. Through this period the social grasp of the writing class in the cities, and the popular appeal of the literature they produced, provided a keel that steadied the historical trajectory of the written language and a magnet that not only held together the far-flung writing community but also standardized the speech of polite society. Eventually, however, a process of vernacularization emerged and this Persianate unity and stability began to disintegrate. The process began first in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th centuries, as the language of administration in the west shifted gradually to a highly Persianized “Ottoman” Turkish. In India it was facilitated by the British decision in 1835 to switch from Persian to a partnership of English with Urdu (a creole of Persian superimposed on an Indic grammar). It accelerated in the 20th century with the steady rise of literacy encouraged by nationalism, similar to the earlier shift from Latin to the vernaculars in Western Christendom. Over the past 50 years Persian, however, written as well as spoken, has probably changed as much or more than in the preceding 500 years, and there is now noticeable divergence in usage between Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. But Persian continues to be highly influential as a written language throughout the area. Thanks largely to the continuing popularity of “classical” poetry from before the era of modern nation-states the process of disintegration has been very gradual and is by no means complete.

I first heard “*farsi*” in an English sentence in the early 1970s. It gradually became common, first outside academia, then inside. Before about 1970 the Persian language was of little interest outside academia, but since about 1980 we have become dependent on non-academic interest in the language for justification that is now necessary to pursue it in academia.¹ Although the change is not difficult to explain, it tends to create divisions, even discrimination, where none existed previously. For this, and perhaps other more sentimental, even romantic, reasons, the International Society for Iranian Studies and some other academic bodies have taken a formal position against the use of *farsi* in English.

Why should the change have occurred? Unlike the change from Persia to Iran which was mandated for diplomatic usage by Reza Shah in 1935, there was no official pressure. Why should it have occurred when it did? In what context should we ask these questions? *Urdu* is, after all, in English regularly called Urdu, and always has been. We do not question why *hindi* is called Hindi in English. On the other hand, we would not call Greek *ellenika*. And to call German *Deutsch* or French *français* in an English sentence would raise eyebrows. So consistency does not appear to be a factor. Is it perhaps a modern form of orientalism? Persian came into English in the 18th century as an anglicization of Herodotus' Greek. Why should we change it now to match the usage of native speakers, when we do not make similar changes for other languages?

The new usage seems to have appeared during the period when the number of native English speakers visiting and working in Iran was increasing on a scale for which there may have been no precedent in any other Middle Eastern or Muslim country. The perpetrators were diverse and not easy to classify, including various types of professionals and nonprofessionals. Perhaps

¹ Earlier, shorter versions of this article, with somewhat different emphases relating more directly to curricular issues, have been published in Spooner 1992 and 1994.

the movement derived from a sense that *farsi* suggests some degree of familiarity with an exotic culture, a cachet. It also connotes the equal value of another cultural community on its own terms. It is patently modern, perhaps even postmodern. "Persian," on the other hand, may carry connotations of elitism, romanticism, even Orientalism of an earlier type. It is by implication dated.

The shift is not, however, without more serious implications. In the case of most languages which are commonly learned by non-native speakers, the consequences of replacing the English name of the language with the native name would be no more than stylistic, and might even suggest increased international significance both for the language and for its speech community. Unfortunately, calling Persian *farsi* has the opposite effect. Since Afghanistan and Tajikistan now use different native terms for the language, the new usage may even be a symptom of its declining international status, for it reduces it to a local level, making national political connotations inescapable. In fact, by changing the English name of the language now we may appear to choose political sides and risk becoming complicit agents of larger changes. We are, of course, impotent to manage the naming of anything beyond our own small academic and professional community throughout the English-speaking world. However, by analysing the processes at work we may learn more about one of our perennial concerns: the dynamic interplay between language and other dimensions of culture.

In what follows, I have limited objectives. I argue that careful attention to the naming issue may illuminate some of the darker corners of the policy picture. We must avoid doing anything that would contribute to the deracination of Persian from its larger cultural and historical context and legitimate a new status for it as just another national language, albeit of a country with a population of some seventy million. I am particularly concerned that the change invalidates much of the justification we have for insisting that the place of Persian as a supra-national literary language (because of its administrative and literary role in Asia over the past millenium) should be more secure than, say, Hungarian or Bengali. In brief, if we use "*farsi*" as the English name of the language, the role of Persian as one of the main languages of writing in world history is lost to English speakers (and generally to non-Persian speakers). I shall therefore first attempt to place the phenomenon in its historical context.

I. *Dari, farsi, and tojiki*

Persian and *farsi* are, of course, in origin not different names. They both emerged from the same political situation some two thousand five hundred years ago. Based on a summer capital in an area known as *Pars* in what is now southern Iran, the Achaemenians established an empire covering most of southwest Asia. As a result of their success the toponym "*pars*" lives on in three related traditions:

- (i) Arabicized in the New Persian name of the province "*Fars*" in southern Iran, and
- (ii) Arabicized in the name of the language, *farsi*, and
- (iii) Hellenized in the Greek *pers-* (the Greeks associated the Persians with their mythical hero Perseus), derivatives of which are still used to denote everything related to the high

culture of Iran (pre-Islamic and Islamic) in Western languages. The root that gives us Persian became inseparable from the administrative language of the empire and the homeland of the Achaemenians in southern Iran. Persian (the language) and *farsi* are historically reflexes of the same word. But apart from the fact that Anglicized Greek suits English better than Arabicized Persian, local connotations and usages of the latter have recently changed in some respects (as a result of modern nationalism) that are irrelevant to our generally more academic concerns, as characterized in the former.

After the Achaemenians, the Persian language evolved under the succeeding empires (Seleucids 312 - 250, Parthians 250 BC - 226 AD, Sasanians 226 - 651), losing its inflections (as Hellenistic Greek did over the same period), and reemerged in its modern form after the Arab conquest, since when it has changed so slowly that texts from over a thousand years ago are as readable to modern Persian-speakers, of any country, as Shakespeare is to modern English-speakers. In the first ten centuries of the Islamic period it spread over an even larger area extending into the Tarim Basin (modern Xinjiang) in the east and the Deccan plateau of peninsular India in the south. Most of this vast area came to be dominated by Persian-speaking Muslim ruling classes of what may be called (after Hodgson 1974) "Persianate" culture, a culture that was associated since the Achaemenians with the idea of Iran (cognate with our "Aryan"), which became a local modern identity only with the rise of nationalism in the region beginning in the 19th century. The language inevitably served not only as the language of government and bureaucracy but of all the functions of court (i.e. Government) life, of which perhaps the most significant in the long term has been a monopoly on all genres of literary production, familiarity with which became the core of Persianate identity. Once established in these roles, Persian continued to dominate them down to the present century, when finally, long after Persianate culture began to decline through much of the area, the geopolitical situation began to change irrevocably. This change, when it finally came, was not as might at first be surmised, the result of the intrusion of foreign powers, but rather of their departure.

For a thousand years, therefore, Persian enjoyed cultural preeminence over a large proportion of central, western, and southern Asia. This area is roughly equivalent to what Le Strange (1905) called the "Eastern Caliphate." But the direct influence of Persian even today extends beyond the Eastern Caliphate proper, most obviously into the lives of the Hindus of South Asia, whose modern languages are replete with Persian loan words and calques. The everyday language of local communities throughout this vast area was

- (a) a variety of dialects of Persian,
- (b) a variety of other Iranian languages. The relatively well-known Balochi, Kurdish, Ossetic, Pashto, Yaghnabi, though still important, have not developed a standard form. A large number of smaller languages remain undescribed. Many others have disappeared in recent centuries.
- (c) a variety of Indo-Aryan languages and dialects
- (d) a variety of Turkic vernaculars.

For about the same length of time, since the beginning of the movement of Turkic peoples into southwest Asia, Turkic has spread at the expense of both Persian and other Iranian languages for purposes of everyday communication between non-literate speakers of different languages—that is, as a local or regional lingua franca. Over large areas, starting in Azarbaijan and spreading east, Turkic eventually eclipsed many minor, localized Iranian languages. But Persian was the principle language of writing, and continued to function as the overall *koine* for any public interaction related to the written record, whether administrative or literary. As much as half of the population of modern Iran now speaks a form of Western Turkic for domestic or other purposes, but all literacy (with only minor exceptions) and (secular) education continue to be in Persian. Even after the growth in this century of literacy and official use of languages other than Persian, mostly in the parts of the region that came under colonial administrations, where it suited Russian policy in the North and British policy in India to encourage Turkic and Urdu respectively, Persian continued to be important as a second language for the intelligentsia and in the educational system. It is not entirely coincidental that Persian ceased to be required in schools in India and Pakistan at about the same time (early 1960s) as Latin ceased to be a requirement for entry to Oxford and Cambridge. It is now suppressed in modern Hindi, though still evident, as in modern Turkish, and even modern Greek.

Despite enormous diversity and periodic upheaval at the level of community life, the history of this vast area throughout the two and a half millennia from Cyrus to Khomeini displays an remarkable degree of continuity and homogeneity in literate or high culture. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that *farsi* continued as the Persian name of the language throughout the area to the present day. The continuing use of the term “English” by Americans and others comes to mind as an analogous continuity, though with a much shorter history.

The future, however, appears less assured. Political, social, and economic changes over an area much larger than the modern state of Iran, and extending into the global Iranian diaspora that has developed since the 1979 revolution in Iran, are reflected in a changing awareness of the language that has for so long been a symbol and focus of Iranian identity. Here and there particular speakers or groups make various efforts to conserve or to change the language and attitudes toward it. Between the 1930s and the 1960s several efforts were made to romanize the Persian script, but without impact. In the Islamic period this language-and-literature-based identity was until recently also largely an attribute of class. The current rise of a new self-consciousness among all Persian speakers perhaps can be explained only in the context of similar intensification of linguistic and ethnic community identities throughout the world.

Such changes in the way speakers relate to unity and diversity in their language are, of course, not uncommon in recent history. Common speech is often seen as a reflection or even a condition of common heritage or of common interests, and lack of it (however broadly or narrowly defined) as a clincher of cultural difference, though it may perhaps just as often be ignored. Much has been published in recent decades about the language policies of colonial powers and about linguistic nationalism. This work is not irrelevant to the continuing uncertainties in the politics of Iran and its neighbors. But the effective context of the continuing history of Persian includes a number of other factors.

Despite the continuing use of the term "*farsi*" even now throughout the area, some regional variation has been officially recognized. Although this recognition has been at the government level, it is not entirely without popular support. Persian was renamed "*tojiki*" in the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan (and, by extension, in the Persian-speaking communities of the neighboring Soviet republics and through the Soviet Union) in 1928. The Soviet authorities changed not only the name of the language but also the alphabet. They first changed it to Roman; by discontinuing education in the Perso-Arabic script they effectively restricted access to materials printed in Persian outside Soviet territory. This change also broke the most basic connection with the Islamic world by separating the script of general literacy from the script of the text of the Qur'an. Later, in 1940, the alphabet was changed to a modified Cyrillic, thus reinforcing the political relationship with Russia and the other Soviet republics (which underwent the same change at about the same time as part of a rebirth under Stalin of the Russification policy of the Czars).

The change of alphabet was an interesting experiment. It had long been advocated by Westernizers as a means to increase literacy. For this reason it was attempted first in Azerbaijan in 1922, and effected with success and to some foreign acclaim outside the Soviet union in Turkey in 1928. There is, however, still no reliable evidence to recommend it as a method of increasing literacy. Literacy has risen significantly since the 1960s not only in Turkey and in the Soviet republics, which changed their alphabets, but also and perhaps to a greater extent in Iran, which retained its modified version of the Arabic script. Perhaps no two languages are exactly comparable in the functionality of their alphabets, but the countries with the highest literacy rates in the world include Thailand and South Korea, whose alphabets would not be likely to rank very high on an international scale of functionality or simplicity. Although Persian in the Perso-Arabic alphabet is written phonetically, spelling is complicated by a number of factors: there are several phonetically redundant letters, short vowels are normally not represented, and most diphthongs are not distinguished. Moreover, in the Perso-Arabic alphabet, at least until very recently, only the standard literary language was ever written, never any vernacular (cf. the case of historical Chinese).

When Cyrillic was adapted for use in writing Persian, it was designed not only to be completely phonetic but also to represent the language as spoken by the Central Asian intelligentsia. Differences that marked the speaker as coming from a particular area immediately and for the first time became differences of spelling and standard vocabulary and syntax. Even the name of the language changed: *tajiki* in Perso-Arabic became *tojiki* in the modified Cyrillic. Persian in Tajikistan was thus cut adrift from the standard form of the language, and the scene was set for local divergence from the international "classical" standard (which had been maintained by inter-city correspondence in the absence of any central authority for a thousand years) through convergence not only with rural dialects of the area (under the influence of Soviet populism) but also with other Iranian languages, and most significantly with Eastern Turkic, especially Uzbek. The process accelerated in the following generation, which now constitutes the senior cohort of the Tajik intelligentsia, who were socialized in an environment of Soviet rather than Islamic-Persianate literacy. Nevertheless, six decades of isolation behind the Soviet border appear not to have been sufficient to break the ties of language and culture inherent in the common use of Persian, and the status difference between *farsi*, the international standard, and *tojiki* (despite its recent standardization) though not as abrupt as before, has not disappeared.

Now as the Tajiks become aware of the significance of their unexpected independence and renew relations with their Persophone neighbors, they are faced with a new dilemma. Should they keep the Cyrillic alphabet, in which they were educated (either in *tojiki* or, in the case of many of the intelligentsia, in Russian), or switch back to the Perso-Arabic? To stay with Cyrillic would defeat their purpose of rejoining their historical community, the only community fully open to them. But if they switch and the neighboring post-Soviet Islamic republics do not, they will have cut themselves off from the *tojiki* speakers of Samarqand and Bokhara, and the rest of Central Asia, the closest members of their pre-Soviet historical community. There are no reliable census figures for these other Central Asian Persian speakers, but they could easily exceed the number of native Persian speakers in Tajikistan. Tajikistan did, in fact, legislate an official change back to Arabic in 1989, but legislation is easier than implementation (cf. Perry 1996, 1997, and 1999).

Thirty years after the Soviets changed the alphabet in Tajikistan, Afghanistan confronted a similar problem due to the rise of Iranian cultural and political influence in the region. In the modernizing governments that ruled Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey in the 1920s—under King Amanullah, Reza Shah, and President Ataturk respectively—only Ataturk was ready (and able) to disregard Islamic sensibilities and break the relationship between literacy and Islam by changing the script. In Afghanistan the main concern was to reduce the cultural power of Iran. For this reason in the new constitution of 1964 Afghanistan changed the name of the language as used in Afghanistan to *dari*.² This relatively minor change was sufficient to give rein to nationalists who wished to introduce elements of vernacular usage into the written language, making it divergent from the politically dominant form of Persian emanating from Iranian nationalism. *Dari*, which signifies “the language of the court” (as distinct from *farsi*, which signifies “the language of the province Fars in Iran”), had been available as an alternative to *farsi* as the name of the language since the earliest times. New Persian had emerged from Middle Persian as the language of the local courts that began in the 9th century to take back power from the Caliphs in Baghdad, less than two hundred years after the Arab-Islamic conquest. Just as everyday educated Persian speech in Tajikistan had been influenced by Uzbek and by other rural languages and dialects, and later by Russian, in Afghanistan it was influenced by Pashto (the “national” language, though not the language of the national bureaucracy) and by Urdu. Although literacy in Pashto was still negligible at the time and still lags far behind Persian within Afghanistan, a number of institutions were given Pashto names to be used irrespective of language, such as “*pohantun*” for university (after Iran had introduced the Persian-based *daneshgah*), making official *dari* immediately divergent from Iranian *farsi*, in ways very similar to the divergence between Indian Hindi and Pakistani Urdu after Partition. By choosing the name *dari* Afghans implied that their Persian was the true Persian, and therefore superior to the *farsi* of the Iranians. In this connection it is worth remembering that New Persian emerged after the Arab conquest in what is now Afghanistan, and in the second half of the 18th century (before the era of modern nation-states in the region) the Afghan Empire was larger than the Iranian.

² In this connection it is interesting to remember that in the tug-of-war that has emerged between Persian and Pashto over the past hundred years the Pashtuns raised their own language, Pashto, to official status, nominally equal to Persian, when Afghans needed to distinguish themselves nationalistically from the Iranians. Cf. Nawid, this volume.

The standard Persian of Iran has, of course, similarly been influenced by local linguistic factors. Historical convergence on the local level has produced divergence from the standard literary new Persian of the mediaeval period. It would, in fact, not be easy to determine objectively which modern form of Persian has diverged least from the mediaeval standard. The main differences lie in certain verb forms (most of which are periphrastic), in choice of loan words, and in the adoption of a number of neologisms generated by an academy. However, partly because Afghans, Iranians, and Tajiks (among others) all rightly claim Persian as their heritage, and partly because their separation into different language communities is recent and incomplete, for educated speakers there continues to be no problem of mutual intelligibility. Persian continues to be the main language for all public purposes not only in Iran but also in Afghanistan, which (with Tajikistan where the role is shared with Russian) have a combined population approaching a hundred million, as well as being the domestic or community language of millions more in the other Central Asian republics, Pakistan and the Persian Gulf (and an international diaspora). Moreover, beyond these primary communities and although largely forgotten, it continues (like Latin in the West) to play an important role in vocabulary and word-building in the other languages of the area (comparable to the continuing use of Greek and Latin in English). Throughout, it continues to be known informally and locally as *farsi*.

To summarize, apart from the colonial language policies of the past and local nationalistic sentiments today, the idea of a separate identity in *dari* and *tojiki* continues to have limited significance for native speakers. Those who emphasize them have more concern for national cultural equality than for linguistic form (if only because as separate standards they are inadequately described and the amount of scholarship—international as well as local—relating to them is of little significance). Whatever the future may hold for Persian in Central and Southwest Asia, Persian speakers today still identify with a single language community. Beyond this cultural core Persian continues to enjoy a high cultural value among the large number of people who speak, read, and write it as a second or third language.

II. Persian I and Persian II

Outside Iran, "Persia" remained the Western name for the Iranian polity from the time of Herodotus until the Iranian government requested the use of "Iran" in diplomatic correspondence in 1935. Shortly before the 1979 revolution official usage was once again made optional (in view perhaps of the public relations value not only of the connotations of "Persia" in European languages but also of a more categorical differentiation from Iraq). But the separation of the name of the country (Iran) from the name of the language (Persian) for a full generation had already had its effect in the popular mind and made easier the introduction of *farsi* to English usage. Persian is now generally known only as the national language of Iran and might therefore just as well (it may be argued) be called by a distinctive name. Meanwhile, *dari* and *tojiki* have easily acquired in the West the separate identity the Soviet and Afghan governments had sought for them.

Much else has changed that was beyond the control of governments, as part of the general shift in relations between the countries in the area and between these countries and the Western world. After the severance of diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States in 1979,

academic enrollments in Persian in American universities decreased significantly (similar to the case of Chinese after 1949). There is also a significant change in the objectives of students who enroll. The establishment in America of a major branch of the Iranian post-revolutionary diaspora—one of the most highly educated of its type—has generated a new type of student, pursuing cultural *heritage* within the American liberal-arts framework—an option not readily available to immigrants from, for example, Vietnam or the Philippines! University programs that were designed to train students for doctoral research in history and literature have more and more been called on to cater to the interests of ‘heritage language’ students with essentially non-academic objectives. Since university curricula are now largely enrollment-driven, these interests must be accommodated.

This accommodation cannot but influence the way we teach. We are obliged to reevaluate our programs and their relationship to the rest of the curriculum. We find, for example, that for most purposes, a Persian language course is now measured in simple functional terms against courses in other “less commonly taught” languages (LCTLs), not (as was the case until the early 1980s) in terms of its success as an introduction to one of the world's great literatures, which represented a major episode of world civilization as well as the living heritage of several Asian countries and the basis of educated speech and literacy for a hundred million people. Lack of awareness of what might be called the changing academic ecology of Persian has led us to react defensively against the type of demands that are made of LCTL instructors in general, that Persian should be taught primarily as a spoken language of everyday life, according to the informal pronunciation of the capital, Tehran.

The University of Pennsylvania has been teaching Persian intermittently since the early part of the last century and continuously since 1949. But until the 1970s it was taught as a classical language only—the language of one of the world's richest literary traditions, dating from the tenth century and still vital today as the basis of public interaction, with no break in continuity. It was in this form, after all, that it continued to be important also as a professional language among native speakers of other languages in the region. Persian had entered the Western curriculum in the first place not because it was the national language of Iran, but because it had been an international language of educated speech and writing throughout a large part of the civilized world, comparable to Hellenistic Greek, the original *koine*, which predominated in similar functions over an overlapping area a millennium or so earlier. Persian has now for some time been taught in all the major Middle East programs in the United States, but as a modern rather than a classical language. Academic attitudes toward it have changed as a result not only of the emergence of Iran as a major regional power in the 1960s but also because of changes in academic priorities and in the criteria (never entirely explicit) for the inclusion of particular languages in the curriculum. Few now are aware that the earliest Western students of Persian had studied it in the 18th century as the bureaucratic and classical language of Mughal India. Official interest in the language grew because of its importance beyond the “North West Frontier” (though within India its importance was declining, and it was replaced with Urdu for official purposes in 1835-7). Interest faded following the independence and partition of India in 1947. Now most prospective students associate Persian almost exclusively with modern life in Iran and study it because of Iran's role in the Middle East. There is at least one case of an experienced Persian instructor being considered ineligible for promotion because of an Afghan accent—in a major American university.

Changing attitudes towards Persian in the West are related to changes on the ground in the region, and the relationship works both ways. Since the early 1970s at Penn and elsewhere, the teaching of Persian as it is used for everyday public purposes in modern Tehran has gradually diverged from the teaching of the classical form of the language. In most cases students now are introduced to Persian first as the standard language of modern Iran, only secondarily in its classical form, and rarely at all in its other standard national forms—of Afghanistan and Tajikistan—let alone the non-standard forms still in use in considerable populations scattered (somewhat unevenly) throughout the region. This divergent and narrowing specialization of Persian instruction has resulted partly from the pressures of funding agencies, which have sought to promote social science studies and country-oriented research at the expense of literature and region-oriented research in area-studies programs, and partly also from a diversification of academic, professional, and other interests among students. But the divergence has confused rather than clarified the situation, because it is usually not explicit, it is by no means complete, and it is more evident in some institutions than others.

There is also inconsistent classification of the language in terms of difficulty for English speakers. It is important to note that Persian (when taught as the modern language of Iran) is relatively easy to begin with, because some of the basic vocabulary is cognate with English and the syntax is similar. Beyond the initial hurdle of a strange alphabet, the student finds relatively simple sentences with familiar structures. Partly for this reason introductory Persian classes are often relatively large. However, few students progress far into the intermediate level because of the increasing need to deal with vocabulary, syntax, and usage that are culturally alien to English speakers as a result of the high degree of convergence with the major non-Indo-European languages in the region, Arabic and Turkish, as well as the importance of imported Arabic vocabulary. Enrollments in Persian (when taken for essentially nonacademic, but now common, purposes) tend to fall off sharply after the first year, further endangering its future in the curriculum.

We are left with a dilemma. Persian has at best an uncertain future in Western universities. If it is seen as the national language of Iran, with little to distinguish it from other less-commonly-taught languages in the eyes of the average administration, its best chance for survival is probably along the lines of Armenian, supported by an expatriate community with ties to a home country. In the long term it is unlikely to attract more than the occasional student of non-Iranian background. But there is little evidence so far to suggest that the Iranian expatriate community, despite its size and its resources, would support Iranian studies as strongly as the Armenian community supports Armenian. This process will weaken the status of Persian outside Iran.

III. Policy Implications

Decisions about language policy in Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan in particular, but also to some extent in the region in general are made in the shadow of the heritage of a millennium in which Persian was the principal, if not the only written language. (Arabic was little used outside the madrasa, where Persian was also used.) This shadow plays differently in different countries today because of the local nationalistic relations that have evolved between them over the past century. Iran can only gain from international acceptance of Persian as one of the major

languages of world literacy. The other countries face a dilemma: if their language is the same as Iran's they lose their major defense against what they identify as Iranian cultural imperialism. By using a different name for their modern version of Persian and allowing it to diverge as a result of separation from the longstanding textual tradition of the region (which is now associated primarily with Iran), they gain socio-political reinforcement for their local nationalism, but they weaken their claim to its historical base. The spread of modern education favors the political process and reduces the value of the textual tradition. The division of Persian in the Western curriculum into *dari*, *farsi* and *tajiki* is similarly related to a shift of academic interest from the textual tradition to political realities.

The die is probably already cast, though much depends on regional politics over the coming generation. To break out of this track it would be necessary not simply to make the negative case: that Persian should be broken into three national languages to be categorized as LCTLs and programmed in the curriculum according to modern standard methods, if at all. Rather, a major investment in the construction of a positive case is required, perhaps through UNESCO channels: that Persian be recognized along with a very few other languages at the level of international cultural heritage—as a language whose native speakers are outnumbered by those who use it to varying degrees for a range of purposes, including professional and research purposes, as a second or third language because of the literature for which it became a vehicle over the past millennium. Such a category of languages would include English and French in the Western world and Chinese in Asia. (There would of course be other candidates.) Categorized in this way it would be easier both for the countries concerned to build positively on their shared linguistic heritage, and to maintain a place for Persian (inclusive of Dari, Farsi and Tajiki) in the Western or international curriculum. The academic appeal of Persian would be increased and less dependent on the vagaries of international politics. Instruction in it could once again be integrated into a larger program of courses on the history and cultural products for which it is the key, for a liberal-arts curriculum, rather than being ghettoized with other LCTLs, as a skill.

In the meantime we should choose our terms carefully, and avoid using terms that could bring the force of Western hegemony behind the process of (non-Western) linguistic divergence. If we leave no doubt that what we are teaching is Persian, in the larger or inclusive sense, we can continue to claim that we are teaching not only the major language of Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan (as English programs teach the English of America, Anglo-phone Africa, Australasia, South Asia, the U.K., etc.), but also an historically important international language that continues to play an important role in vocabulary building in other historically related languages. Spanish provides a similar case. If some of us say we teach *farsi*, we risk being overtaken for good by the “national language” image with the implication that what we teach is no more or less important (or loved) than the modern nation-state of Iran. The “*farsi*” image will sweep us along in the direction mapped out by the Soviet colonial ideology and the linguistic nationalisms it has left behind, besides implicating us in the more dubious crime of unnecessarily inventing English words. Those of us who are native speakers to boot might perhaps also be accused of linguistic imperialism. But more significantly, by disguising the international and historical significance of the language by using the term *farsi* in situations where it is not necessary to distinguish particular details of modern usage in different countries, we not only damage our case for keeping Persian and its literature in the liberal-arts curriculum, but we also lend the weight of the

international curriculum to linguistic divergence in Central Asia. As a result the status of Persian outside Iran is likely to be reduced.

In either case, if we continue to emphasize modern usage in language studies, we have a serious problem. We have to organize our teaching around the standard usage of a particular community of native speakers. Which “standard” Persian pronunciation and usage are we to work with in this multi-national, multi-cultural age? *dari?* *farsi?* *ortojiki?* If we take the position that we are working with Persian, the historical international language, in full consciousness of all the implications, we have an excellent case for defining our own role in the changing modern curriculum and reclaiming the status that Persian used to hold in it, making us immune to the pressures that have recently put us on the defensive. However, maintaining this position will require strong leadership, because it puts us at odds with the professional community of modern language teachers that has emerged over the past generation, who are native speakers of one variety of the language. Meanwhile, language policy in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and other countries of western and south Asia are torn between the historical forces of identity that depend on the cultural value of classical Persian poetry and the modern forces of ethnicity and nationalism that demand ethno-linguistic integrity.

Since the Islamic Republic of Iran is the largest modern community of Persian speakers, this discussion would not be complete without some attention to the Iranian point of view, specifically a review of what has been done in Iran over the past few generations by language-conscious Iranians both in and out of government to promote the modern value of the language that is their treasured heritage and the major historical thread in their cultural and modern political identity (cf. the powerful case made in Meskoob 1992). The process of nationalization of the language began in the colonial period. Neither Iran nor Afghanistan were actually taken over by a Western imperial power. But the British interest in India’s northwestern approaches and their concern with Russian imperial expansion and European intrigue were the major factors leading to the definition, organized by the British, of an internationally recognised border between Afghanistan and Iran guaranteeing them both the status of modern nation-states (cf. Goldsmid 1876, McLachlan 1994).

Although the major historical cities of the Persianate world have been distributed fairly evenly throughout the territory that is now divided among Afghanistan, Central Asia and Iran, the history of the last three centuries has left modern Iran with the largest claim to represent the achievements of the past. How did this happen? The first half of the 18th century was a period of general decline and disintegration in south, central and southwest Asia. Then the major cities of Central Asia (Bokhara, Khwarazm, Marv, Samarqand) were cut off from the larger Persianate world by Russian expansion, a partition of the Islamic world that was later reinforced by the Soviet Government. The founding of Afghanistan in 1747 was achieved in basically the same way as all the earlier cases of Islamic history (a process that was immortalized by ibn Khaldun four centuries earlier), but from a city (Qandahar) that had not previously been a Persianate capital. So Afghanistan, which had been at the geographical center of the cited Persianate world was built not on cited^{23"/> heritage of the Persianate world, but on the tribal heritage of its geographical interstices. Although the historical cities of Herat, Kabul, Mazar, and Qandahar,}

^{3"/>88 This term was introduced by Hodgson in order to highlight the importance of urban formations, while avoiding the evaluative connotations of other terms like “civilized” (Hodgson, 1974:50)}

and even Ghazni, are important players in the history of Afghanistan, their role is in no way comparable to Isfahan, Kerman, Mashhad, Tabriz and Tehran, among others, in Iran. Herat, which was historically perhaps the most significant of Afghanistan's cities, suffered in the 19th century first from dynastic conflict inside it, and later conflict over it with Iran. Ghazni, which was one of the early political centers of the Persianate world in the 11th century, has never risen back to urban significance. But while Afghanistan became a tribal polity with an urban periphery, Iran was built on a citted core with a tribal periphery. The early rulers of Afghanistan hired a Persianate bureaucracy, but they never integrated with the tribal elite. Iran therefore by the historical accident of urban continuity represents has greater claim to the heritage of the Achaemenians and the Sasanians in the modern world.

Iran's claim is strengthened by the city of Isfahan and the Safavids, and the distinctiveness in the modern world of their Shi'ite Safavid heritage. But for over half a millennium, down to the 16th century, Persian had served as the sole language of public interaction, formal and informal throughout the Persianate world, extending well into China, and southern India, and even for a time under the Ottomans into the Balkans. During this time it carried with it a general culture of Islamic urbanity but no association with any particular political, cultural or religious minority or subcommunity. The rise of the Safavid Empire at the beginning of the 16th century was to transform this situation—as the largest modern political community of Persian speakers, the successor state to Safavid Empire (1501-1722), distinguished from its neighbors as the only state to establish the Twelver Shi'ite interpretation of Islam.

From the time of the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the Arab conquest (651AD) down to the rise of the Safavids (1501) Iran was a cultural concept without a location, while Persian was the language of administration, belles lettres and public life in general, for everyone regardless of their local vernacular. Shi'ism was more prevalent in some parts of the Islamic world than others, and was generally associated not with any government (apart from periods of prominence under the Buyids, 930s-1055 in Mesopotamia and the Iranian Plateau, and the Fatimids, who followed a different branch of Shi'ism in Egypt and North Africa at roughly the same time) but with opposition to legitimate Sunni governments. During the Safavid and later the Qajar periods, partly as a result of the influence of Western ideas and political and economic pressures, the historical idea of Iran had become associated with a particular empire, an empire that promoted the Twelver Shi'ite interpretation of Islam. As Iran was transformed into a nation-state (a process in which Western imperialism was a catalyst), Persian became its national language. The fact that the new Iran claimed a territory that had been at the heart of the pre-Islamic Persian empires helped but did not determine this process. Much of what has now become Afghanistan, or Central Asia or southern Iraq, could claim the same heritage. In the crucial period of the second half of the 18th century Afghanistan was in fact the stronger polity. But the Afghan polity, despite the fact that its second shah established a Persianate administration, arose from a different, non-citted, identity.

Although not understood at the time, the events of this period had the effect of changing the status of Iran and Persian in relation to other Persianate successor states and their use of Persian. As a result the modern issue of the relationship between language and ethnic or national identity emerged and governments began to find the need for policies relating to language use.

The Ottoman Empire had already switched from Persian to a highly Persianate form of “Ottoman” Turkish, in a gradual process beginning as early 15th century. But if the British Government in India had not replaced Persian with Urdu in 1835 (and subordinated Urdu to English), Persian could have become the national language of Pakistan, in continuity with its heritage as the successor state of the Mughal Empire (1526-1857) and the primacy in its territory of the Mughal city of Lahore. For discussion of the change from Persian to Urdu in north and south India see the articles by Aslam Syed and Anwar Moazzam in Spooner and Hanaway (in press). Afghanistan sought to separate itself from the hegemony of Iran by raising the status of Pashto, and in 1964 changing its name for Persian from farsi to dari. In the part of Central Asia north of Afghanistan that came under Russian rule, emphasis shifted to the Turkic vernaculars, with the exception of the late (1928) Soviet creation of Tajikistan where Persian was continued as the national language (though 40% of the population spoke Uzbek and a significant number of the remainder spoke other Iranian languages) but with under a changed name, Tojiki, in the Cyrillic alphabet. The status of Persian in China changed as a result of similar processes. The many other local languages and dialects of Iran were now in conflict with the inclusiveness of modern conceptions of national identity, and their numbers have diminished at an increasing rate since the 1950s.

IV. Language Policy in Iran

Once Persian had become fully nationalized in Iran, the purity of its identity became as important as the purity of Iranian national identity, inclusive within and exclusive without its borders. Language became a matter for government policy in the 1930s. Over the next few decades five specific problems came to be addressed:

1. The proportion of Arabic vocabulary that had been adopted in the written language over the past millennium
2. The modern tendency to adopt loan words from French, and later from English
3. How to create new vocabulary for modern science and technology
4. The rights of ethnolinguistic minorities to publication and education in their own languages
5. How to accommodate the normal processes of language change to issues of language policy.

Underlying all five of these problems was the history of Persian as recounted in this chapter: the barely conscious assumption that Iranian national identity was based on the linguistic continuity of the past millennium as represented in the writings of classical authors, and that it must therefore be managed carefully. Partly for this reason Persian as written continued to change very slowly through the middle of the 20th century, but has speeded up since the 1970s—a process accelerated by a significant rise in the rate of literacy, by increased interaction with the outside world, followed by the social consequences of the revolution.

The first three of the problems enumerated above were dealt with by the establishment of language academies. The work of these institutions and the linguistic awareness that led up to them has been interestingly documented and discussed by Perry (1985). Under Reza Shah (1925-1941) the government had established the first Iranian Academy (Farhangestan) in 1935 with the mandate to coin new words that would keep the language abreast of new developments in the world of science and technology. However, the Academy's tasks also included responsibilities for gathering the language's historical vocabulary, and formulating its grammar, as well as investigating the issue of script or alphabet reform. Insofar as it is related in some way to issues of orthography the historical development of modern nationalistic language awareness among Iran's elite is usefully documented by Hashabeiky (2005, especially chapter 4, pp. 73-124). She reviews discussions of the relationship between Persian and its script from the middle of the 19th century onwards, following the introduction of printing and the expansion of interaction with Europe. News of the initiation of the tanzimat period in the neighboring Ottoman Empire (1839-1876) may also have been a factor, on top of the loss of territory to Russia in the Caucasus (by the Treaties of Golestan in 1813 and Turkmanchay in 1828). The tension between Westernizing intellectuals, many of whom lived abroad, and an Islamizing and nationalistic majority in Iran, which continues today, became significant in the second half of the 19th century. Alphabet reform was considered by many to be a contributing factor to under-development and a sense of national inadequacy in a West-dominated world. But nothing was done about it at the level of government, until the reign of Reza Shah (1925-1941), and his son, Mohammad Reza (1941-1979). The Society for Alphabet Reform was founded in Tehran in 1945. But interest in Romanizing the script seems to have reached a peak in the 1950s. The first Academy achieved little, was inactive for much of the time and finally closed in 1953. It was not reopened until 1970, by which time nationalist concerns about alien vocabulary had shifted from Arabic and French to English (cf. Jazayeri 1958), and interest in Romanization (which had been inspired by Ataturk's example in 1928) had lost its appeal. The work of the second academy was cut off by the events of 1979, and it was not until 1990 that a similar body was again opened, this time with the title of Academy of Persian Language and Literature.

With regard to the fourth question, opposition to the hegemony and monopoly of Persian within Iran was slow to emerge. There were signs of pressure to allow publication in Azari in the 1960s. For a few years starting in the late 1960s the satirical weekly *tawfiq* got away with publishing columns in street Turki and street Arabic, presumably because it appeared to make fun of them. However, publication was not permitted in any of the other major minority languages, such as Balochi, Kurdish, Turkmeni.⁴ This practice was, however, stopped by the mid 1970s. Public use of these languages was restricted to brief radio programs, mainly national news.

Since the Revolution in 1979 Iran is no less nationalistic, but it effuses a new linguistic self-confidence. Several factors may have contributed to this change. The dramatic increase in literacy rates that began with work of the Literacy Corps as part of the White Revolution in 1963 resulted during the 1970s, the period leading up to the Revolution, in a sea change in the historical relationship between the written and spoken language. It was no longer possible for a small elite to control the country through control of the written language—the medium of administration, and national culture and identity. Ordinary people with standard basic education

⁴ Armenian and Assyrian Christians were allowed to publish in their own languages.

now shared the benefits of access to the written language. After the Revolution the class that was as comfortable in French or English, and would rarely talk in Persian with a foreigner, had moved abroad. A new class had become literate and moved into the national elite. Even though Western doctorates were not uncommon among them, they saw no reason not to speak Persian, and they were less concerned to suppress the use of minority languages. Now publication in Azari and Kurdish is common (see <http://kurdistantoday.ir/NewsDetail.aspx?itemid=1683>), though these languages do not compete with Persian to any significant degree, and education remains entirely Persian-medium.

All policy issues in Iran now are influenced both by general processes of globalization and by particular Western attempts to influence. Since the U. S. is now funding Azari broadcasting specifically for Iranian Azari-speakers (see <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav031008a.shtml>) the situation may change again. However, the high literacy rate (irrespective of social class or higher education) and general access to international media make it unlikely that government policy will be able to control language effectively any more in the long term. The rate of change in everyday language usage has picked up, the proportion of Arabic loanwords appears to be decreasing, and the written language is no longer entirely controlled by the models of the classical period. The loss of these classical models in which the models for public behavior were also embedded (known as *adab*) is also seen in the process of cultural change. Now that a population of seventy million has equal access to information and the formation of public opinion, new forms of competition, political voice and public behavior are beginning to appear which would have horrified an earlier generation.

APPENDIX

Is Persian diglossic?

Some readers may wonder why the term diglossia does not appear in this chapter, given the space devoted to it in the Introduction, and the use C. A. Ferguson made of Persian in his initial definition of diglossia (1959:325). In the formative period of modern language studies, when the textual study of a small number of individual languages (philology) gave ground to the study of language in general throughout the world (linguistics), the concept of diglossia was an important contribution to the effort to find patterns in language use that would facilitate comparative studies and the development of theory. Many elements of Persian language usage fit the diglossia pattern. However, by simply dropping Persian into the diglossia basket we would distract attention from a number of other elements that distinguish it from that pattern. Ferguson begins his article by introducing the idea of diglossia as “the use of two or more varieties of the same language” in a single speech community. He then uses Persian (along with Italian) as a prime example of a situation of “perhaps the most familiar” type of diglossia: in which there is a “standard language and regional dialect ... where many speakers speak their local dialect at home or among family or friends of the same dialect area but use the standard language in communicating with speakers of other dialects or on public occasions.” (He does not give sources, and he makes no reference anywhere in his article to the work of scholars who specialized at that time in the study of Persian. However, an earlier article of his (1957) suggests

that he used native speakers who were students at Harvard as informants.) In the same opening paragraph he offers other different examples, and compares the whole phenomenon to the process of language standardization in Germany and France. The article then elaborates his definition by means of a comparative review of the cases of Arabic, Modern Greek, Swiss German, and Haitian Creole. The history of each of these languages, and their diglossic divergence is of course different, as he freely admits. The question here is what would be gained or lost from including Persian in the same catalogue as just another variety of diglossia. The answer to this question is relative, rather than black and white, but is relegated here to an appendix in order to avoid confusion with the argument about language policy.

The concept of diglossia in its broadest sense might be expected to include Persian. But this would leave open the question of whether that would be analytically useful. In its broadest sense diglossia could include even English, or in fact any language with an established tradition of literacy, since every written language develops over time according to a different dynamic from speech. Ferguson's references to Persian, both in the diglossia article (1959) and elsewhere appear to take no account of the larger context of Persian usage, historical and modern, but rather to treat it as comparable to Italian (*ibid.*), viz. simply the language of a single modern national community. This treatment omits a number of significant features. Dropping Persian in the diglossia basket leads the non-specialist to misunderstand a number of factors that make it very different from most of the other languages in that basket, and does nothing to improve our understanding of modern Persian usage. The point of this brief appendix is to describe what distinguishes Persian from the typical diglossic language, and explain why it has evolved differently.

Ferguson was writing in the 1950s, when the literacy rate in Iran was very low (perhaps 30%). Following the development of a Literacy Corps in 1963 (after the model of the U.S. Peace Corps), which provided teachers for village schools throughout the country, within a decade or so the literacy rate rose spectacularly. It is now between 80 and 90%, possibly the highest of all countries using the Arabic script. The importance of these figures lies in what they show about the rate and quality of change in the relationship between written and spoken language over the past half-century. If literacy is a major factor in diglossia, then the nature of diglossia in Iran has changed out of recognition in not much more than a single generation, to the point where if it fitted the situation in the 1950s it would have to be completely redefined for use today.

Attention to the historical situation introduces further complications. The history of Persian continues to be significant in modern usage. As in other parts of the world Iranians today live under the cultural shadow of the past. The past still conditions the present in modern Western societies where history is losing its place in the curriculum. The Islamic World, and Iran in particular, continues to be historically aware, for reasons that are both Islamic and nationalistic.

As we have reviewed already, modern Persian has had a continuous history since its re-emergence in the routinization of political life that followed the Arab conquest of West and Central Asia in the 7th century. During the following centuries it spread fast despite the fact that the lands that had earlier been under Persian rule now looked towards Baghdad and an Arabic speaking Caliph as the symbolic center of the new order. In the 13th century, however, the

Mongols arrived from the East, put an end to the symbolic center in Baghdad and established an empire that stretched from Western Asia into China. Mongol administration became the vehicle for the further expansion of Persian—across Asia into China, into later into southeastern Europe and South Asia.

What English has been for global communication in the 20th century, Persian was in the high Middle Ages—the most important language for government, administration, communication and trade throughout the ecumene. Yes, there was a Latinate world to the west (but Venician nobles sent their sons to Beirut to learn Persian), and a Sinic world to the east (but Persian was the language of commerce along trade routes well into central China, cf. Morgan 2011, and is still taught as a language of religious commentary in many Chinese mosques), and an Arabicate world in Africa (but Persian words found their way into Wolof in modern Senegal). Moreover, English has for the most part not replaced local languages. Persian, on the other hand, offered membership in the larger ecumene of civilized life of the time. Those who joined it were not choosing a high (written) language for a particular purpose and leaving a low (unwritten) language or languages for less formal purposes. Rather by writing Persian and speaking it (as it was written) they were participating in activities of larger political, economic and literary significance, leaving the use of other local languages for interaction with people who operated only on the local level without awareness of Persianate ecumene.

Persian was the English of the high Middle Ages, when Central Asia was the center of the world. But its cultural value and its political and economic significance were always changing. Its use expanded from the 8th to the 13th centuries. It was at its height in the 14th century. And it began to decline in the 15th, through a creeping process of vernacularization, comparable to the emergence of the Romance languages at the expense of Latin in Europe. First, the Ottoman administration switched to a highly Persianized form of Turkish. South Asian vernaculars began to encroach in the 17th century, first Pashto and Urdu, later Sindhi. The British in India finally shifted from Persian to a partnership of English and Urdu in 1835. Perhaps the last government of a non-Persian speaking population to change was the Princely State of Hyderabad which completed the process in 1884 (cf. Moazzam 2011). The process was accelerated in the 19th century by the administrative reorganization of Asia, and division of the Persianate world, under British and Russian imperial rule. Persian had provided the cultural glue that held together all the local Muslim polities and trade centers from Anatolia to the Yellow River and from the Aral Sea to the south of India. When this world became divided between two external non-Muslim empires, Persian lost the function that was its strength. But change in other dimensions of public life lagged, again in ways that are comparable with Latin in the West. Persian continued its literary function into the 20th century. It finally disappeared from the school curriculum in India and Pakistan at roughly the same time as Latin was dropped from the curriculum in England. But the cultural value of its literature continues to support its international status.

As the world continued to change in the 19th and early 20th centuries, not only did the use of language change, but academic attitudes toward the study of language also changed. Although the relationship between Sanskrit and Greek had been noticed in the 16th century, it was the work of Sir William Jones in the 18th century (1746-1794) that spurred the first great expansion of language study to include the textual records of all Indo-European languages. The next

acceleration in the process came with the rise of interest among anthropologists in non-written languages in the late 19th century. Linguistics emerged as a new field of study only in the 1940s, with a new focus on the scientific study of language in general, whether written or not. It gradually incorporated textual studies, as historical linguistics, the textual study of written languages, which had been known as philology. While this development led very quickly to spectacular advances in our understanding of language in general, it tended to orphan some types of historical language study, in particular the historical sociology of literacy. Persian is a very good, perhaps the best, example of such a victim. It has been particularly unfortunate for Persian because (unlike, for example, Latin) so little work had been done on it earlier. Persian has been one of the three most important written languages in world history. Its vast corpus of literature continues to be highly valued in the original as well as in translation in a number of countries besides the three (Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan) which use it under different names (dari, farsi, tajiki) in forms which differ similarly to the modern English of Australia, England and the U.S.

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